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Baker-Polito Administration and U.S.D.A. Forest Service Sign Stewardship Agreement to Support Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership

U.S.D.A. Forest Service Will Provide Assistance on Forest Conservation, Economic Development in Region

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

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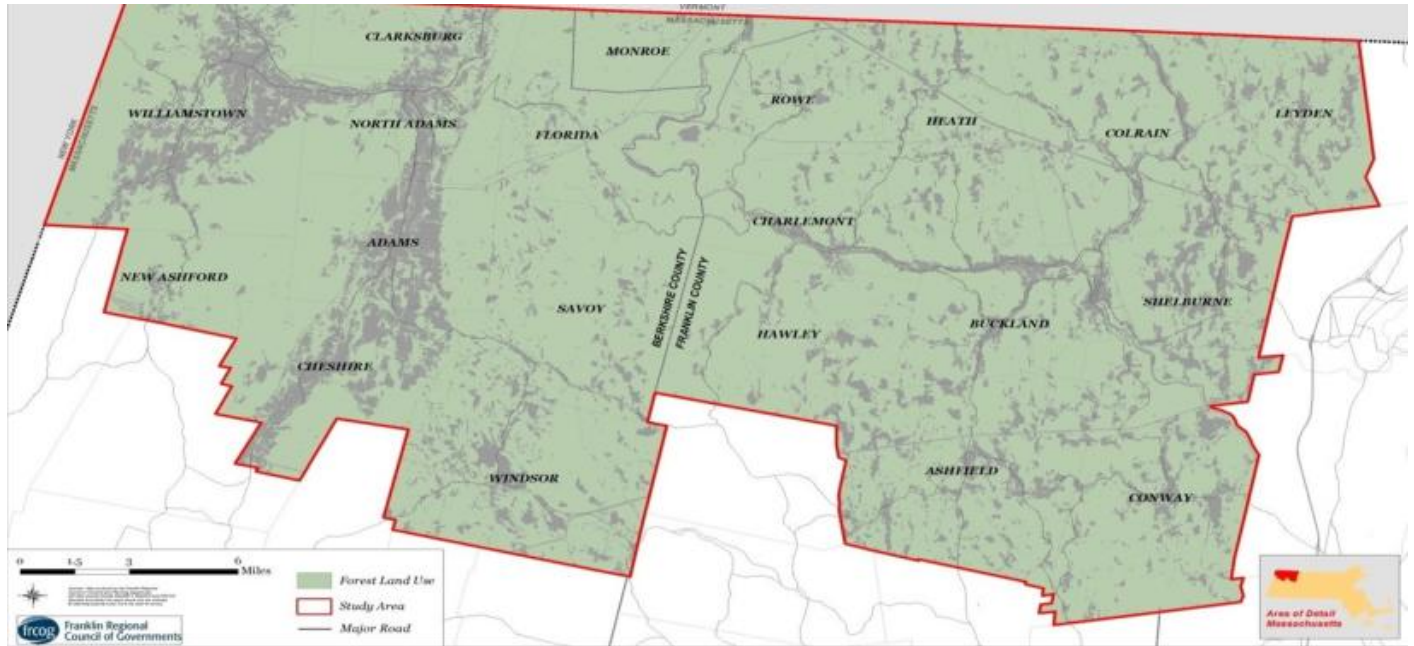
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CHARLEMONT – The Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the United States Department of Agriculture (U.S.D.A) Forest Service today [signed a Shared Stewardship](https://www.fs.fed.us/managing-land/shared-stewardship) (<https://www.fs.fed.us/managing-land/shared-stewardship>) Framework under which they will partner with each other, local governments, and other stakeholders to advance the goals of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership (MTWP) to conserve forests and enhance economic development in the region.

“This partnership with the U.S. Forest Service is a great opportunity to work together to improve forest stewardship and conservation and encourage local economic development based on forestry and tourism,” **said Governor Charlie Baker**. “Our Administration is proud to work with our federal, regional and local partners to support the Commonwealth’s rural communities and ensure the health of the Mohawk Trail region’s natural resources.”

“The Mohawk Trails Woodlands Partnership is an innovative model for private forest conservation and management in support of rural economies and communities,” **said**

Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito. “Our Administration looks forward to continuing to work with the Forest Service and the communities of the Mohawk Trail Woodland Partnership to help them succeed in their efforts to protect the environment, bring economic development to the region, and improve the fiscal stability of its municipalities.”

“Strong working relationships between state and federal agencies are vital in accomplishing shared objectives for the benefit of the land and public we serve. This Shared Stewardship Framework strengthens an already strong partnership between Massachusetts and the Forest Service, advancing our shared goals of encouraging forest conservation, and supporting natural resource-based economic development,” **said USDA Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen.**

Under the Shared Stewardship Framework signed today by Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen and Massachusetts Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Kathleen Theoharides in Charlemont, the Forest Service will designate a project liaison to the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership and will assist on forest research and expanding natural resource-based tourism. This is the first Shared Stewardship Agreement in the 20-state Eastern Region and the first in one of the ten states that do not have a National Forest.

“As we work to address climate change, Massachusetts’ forests are critical to our efforts to both reduce greenhouse gas emissions and ensure the resilience of our communities,” **said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Kathleen Theoharides.** “We are grateful for the support that the Forest Service will provide the Mohawk Trail Woodlands through this Shared Stewardship Agreement.”

Initiated in 2013, the Mohawk Trail Woodland Partnership is a collaboration among the Franklin Regional Council of Governments, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, Franklin Land Trust, Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, a Forest Service Liaison, and the MTWP Advisory Committee, which has representation from each of the 21 communities in the region as well as regional non-profits.

In late 2018, state legislation authorizing the Mohawk Trail Woodland Partnership was signed into law. The Partnership encompasses 361,941 acres of state and private land. Of the 21 communities eligible to join the partnership, 14 communities are now members,

while seven more will vote on whether to join the partnership in the coming months. The Shared Stewardship Framework is an important step in the transition from a locally led vision to a long-term initiative and national model program to conserve and steward the forests, support rural economic development, and strengthen the vitality of these small communities.

The mission of the U.S.D.A. Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. Prior to the signing of the Shared Stewardship Agreement, the Forest Service was closely involved throughout the past five years beginning with the funding of a liaison to enhance communication between the Committee and the Forest Service.

“The Partnership is a community-led project with a committee with diverse interests working together for common goals of forest conservation, natural resource based economic development and financially sustainable communities,” **said Peggy Sloan, Planning Director for the Franklin Regional Council of Governments and co-facilitator for the project.**

“The Mohawk Trail Woodland Partnership is a new and innovative model for forest conservation that supports struggling rural communities,” **said Thomas Matuszko, Executive Director of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and a co-facilitator of the project.**

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